



## **HOSPICE VOLUNTEERS: SPECIAL PEOPLE MEETING SPECIAL NEEDS**

*Generations (Gazette-Times, Democrat-Herald)*

July 2007

by Karen Nousen

Many people know that hospice relies on volunteers to give caregivers a break from the challenges of caring for someone who is terminally ill. What you might not know is the many unusual forms this may take.

"There's no such thing as a typical volunteer when you're talking about hospice volunteers," says Mari Beth Hackett, Volunteer Coordinator at Benton Hospice Service. "Each volunteer brings their own set of experiences, interests, and abilities. We are able to meet just about any request from our hospice families because our volunteers share their time and talents so freely."

There are many different ways a person can volunteer. In addition to providing respite for caregivers, hospice volunteers might cut and style hair, play the harp, guitar, drums, or keyboard, take people fishing, sew comfortable pillows and gowns, go grocery shopping, build wheelchair ramps, prepare meals, rub shoulders, hands, and feet, or read aloud to patients. Any interest or skill can become an avenue for volunteering.

A frequent request is for a visit with a therapy dog. Benton Hospice Service works with the local Welcome Waggers and has several volunteers who take their well-trained dogs to share a little 'puppy love' with patients and families.

Sandra Miller is a Welcome Wagger who has made over 400 visits to more than 85 terminally ill folks with her shih-tzu Kaywanna since 2001. "I get a lot out of it, inside and out," reports Sandra. "Seeing how Kaywanna brings a smile to patients' faces just swells my heart."

But it's not just dogs that go visiting. "Once we had a patient who loved sheep," remembers Hackett. "I asked a volunteer who raised sheep to bring a couple of her lambs on a visit. It was a simple thing that meant a great deal to our patient."

Another highly valued service volunteers provide is through Benton Hospice Service's Compassionate Companion Program. This program is for people who are actively dying and don't want to be alone. Volunteers take shifts and are quietly present with that person around the clock during their last hours of life.

Jerry Hull has attended five different vigils, frequently volunteering for the long, quiet hours in the middle of the night. "I do this because I wouldn't want someone I care about to die alone," says Jerry. "And if I can prevent that happening to someone else, I will."

Another way hospice volunteers support patients and families is through BHS' life history program. Trained volunteers interview and record a patient as they talk about their experiences and memories. Pictures and favorite music are added to the edited footage to create DVDs for families to keep.

"It is a wonderful opportunity for people to reflect on their lives and remember the good times," says Nancy Warren, who has been doing life histories since 2005.

"I often say that the scope of our volunteer program is limited only by the imagination of our volunteers," say Hackett. "When a retired florist came to us with a desire to help, she discovered a way to put her talents to work creating beautiful flower arrangements from the flowers donated each week from the Safeway on Philomath Blvd. These bouquets are bright spots in so many of our patient's days."

Most of all, our volunteers provide helping hands, listening ears and warm hearts. If you have a particular talent you'd like to share or if you'd like to find out more about volunteering at Benton Hospice Service, please contact Mari Beth Hackett, Volunteer Coordinator, at 541-757-9616 or [maribeth.hackett@bentonhospice.org](mailto:maribeth.hackett@bentonhospice.org)